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CLASSISM AND SCHOOLING IN HAWAII

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Ralph Stueber

From the standpoint of Hawaii's recent social history and the struggles over democratization, there is no more interesting and urgent question facing island educational policy makers than that raised recently by historian Lawrence Fuchs, author of Hawaii Pono: A Social History. Reflecting back over the dramatic changes in island life that had come about since his 1961 publication, Fuchs asked:

> What can be done to prevent Hawaii from developing a two-class education system again in which the well-to-do people who mainly come from Haole and Oriental backgrounds send their children to private schools or to schools in the public school system which are favored, and in which poor people in the Islands mainly Hawaiians, Samoans, Portuguese and poorer Haoles who are in a small minority and the poorer Orientals who are also in a small minority, send their kids to neglected public schools--schools which are simply not getting leadership and inspiration and drive and competence because the well-to-do constituents are not investing energy and supporting them better?[1]

The main intent of what follows in the form of a number of sociological-like observations on schooling in Hawaii is to help increase the significance and meaning of the broad and complex question Fuchs poses.

Equality of educational opportunity became the top government priority following World War II as a democratic-reformist surge transformed the Island's social order. Key to the success of that social revolution was education, especially that in the form of schooling, past, present and future.

Hawaii has had a rigid two-class* social and educational system in one form or another since pre-missionary days. Deeply aware of the colonial-like society that had evolved through the course of the nineteenth century, and of the imprinting or transfer effect that social system had had upon the development of schooling, Fuchs has asked in effect: "Has the recent effort to transform the islands' public schools to better fit a democratized society begun to lose its force?"

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* For the purpose of this piece the meaning of the term "class" will depend mainly upon the context in which it is used. In the main it is used to designate a grouping of people with equivalent life chances, chances to improve their position in relation to the rest of society or to hold their position. The term will also designate a grouping of people having common goals based on power and prestige.

In Hawaii Pono, Fuchs attributed to the schools, primarily the public schools and especially McKinley High School, the development of a democratic spirit or aspiration in the young. These schools of the 1920's and 1930's in due time, according to Fuchs, played a key part in the creation of social policies designed to soften class lines and class antagonisms, to temper racial mistrust and bridge the confining ethnic outlooks so prevalent in pre-war Hawaii.

This essay is essentially descriptive of the highlights of Hawaii's two-class educational-social system and of efforts to reform public schooling. But first some qualifications appear to be in order.

The writer appreciates much more, after expending considerable time and effort, the great difficulty of gleaning out the pertinent facts about classist education and subsequent reform efforts. Obviously not all that is significant about schooling is observable. Those who have thought or written or who participated directly in island school policy-making from a broad social and cultural perspective know something of the immense range of attitudes, values skills, knowledge and beliefs that operated historically in the patterning and development of schooling in Hawaii. Especially important have been those cultural attributes related to the shaping of the economic and political goals to which schooling was to contribute. That is to say they know something of the dominant mind-set, ideology or social images that fostered the development and maintenance of a dual system of schools: essentially one for the elite class and one for the common people, the masses. Thought had to be given to the description of that mind-set. The identification of the contradictions between that mind-set and the ideals of equality, freedom, justice, and democracy is essential in taking up the question of reform.

Those readers who have grown up with the direct experience of attending island schools are aware that in some fundamentally powerful way ethnic, religious, economic, communications and political forces shaped their school experiences. But generally, when school experience is coupled with out-of-school peer group experience and the values of the home, it is virtually impossible to factor out just exactly where and how a given class outlook came to be formed.

It is a rare individual in the islands, whether schooled in island schools or not, who does not have a strong opinion to offer as to why some schools are better than others. Class factors, rather than purely individual factors, strongly color these opinions and beliefs about how they were formed and upon what they are based.

Rarely, if ever, is it heard publicly today that it should not be the government's direct responsibility to insure that all of Hawaii's youngsters be given equal educational opportunity. It appears that a different dominant mind-set about schooling and the role of government has developed. Perhaps, in part, this new mind-set can be attributed to the nature of the school experience itself.

The above is taken to mean that in historical perspective, schooling ought not be allowed to be organized again as if there are pre-ordained or pre-determined classes of people for which different classes or kinds of schools are appropriate. Further, this equalitarian view is tempered to allow for the testing, grading and tracking of students through different curricula so long as these activities occur as part of a single public school system. The view does not sanction segregation on a school system basis.

Hawaii's cultural complexity defies complete and readily acceptable or agreed upon analysis of the multiple ways in which peoples' attitudes, values, skills, knowledge and beliefs have infused and in turn been shaped by her historic, economic, and political institutions. But it is generally agreed upon that those whose outlook and behavior have been fundamentally shaped by schooling to an "approved" standard have acquired an orientation to life heavily influenced by Hawaii's economic and political leaders, dependent as schooling is upon this leadership. Therefore, to get at a description of Hawaii's historic classist-oriented education and of reform efforts it is both necessary to consider the dominant mind-set and the institutions through which this mind-set was expressed and the conflict and struggle by which a new mind-set emerged and by which institutional reform came to express that new mind-set.

In the broadest sense, schooling in Hawaii as we know it developed after the collapse of Hawaiian culture and was a part of a dominating westernizing and industrializing cultural revolution. This early phase of educational development ran its course in the nineteenth century and comprises a tiny but significant part of the total impact of western and American imperialism in the Pacific. This phase was capped by annexation in 1898.

A commission report immediately following annexation made clear to the American Congress that it was unnecessary to make any fundamental changes in island educational practice. In that report are found the following conclusions and recommendations to Congress:

> The present public school system of Hawaii is very satisfactory and efficient. The conduct of the public schools and the tendency of the entire educational establishment of Hawaii is in the highest degree advantageous to the United States. The laws of Hawaii already provide that school attendance of all persons of school age shall be compulsory, and also that the English language shall be the universal language taught. The effect of these two enactments is the most beneficial and far-reaching in unifying the inhabitants which could be adopted. It operates to break up racial antagonisms otherwise certain, to increase and to unite in the schoolroom the children of the Anglo-Saxons, the Hawaiians, the Latins, and the Mongolians in the rivalry for obtaining an education. No system could be adopted which would tend to Americanize the people more thoroughly than this.[2]

In general attitude and value orientation the commission report reads like most written by Americans in Hawaii during the latter quarter of the century. Essentially, Hawaii was pictured as a frontier or succession of frontiers of American interests in trade, religious proselytizing, whaling, and a form of military-like agriculture. It was around these interests that had been built the economic, religious and educational institutions now, in 1898, judged ready to be taken into political union with the United States.

On the frontier of knowledge there was some scant evidence that racial characteristics were being discounted as determiners of intellect and educability. In place of race, a minority of Hawaii's scholars saw the formative influences of social, cultural and educational environments as prime in their shaping influence on society, especially upon the young. This radical thought touched down briefly on school policy makers late in the century but was quickly "corrected."

Cultural arrogance was all pervading. In spite of the "civilizing mission"[3] which followed in the wake of commercial aggressiveness and nationalistic pride in the form of churches, medicine and schooling, even that "mission" was permeated by the belief that western style of society, of thought and culture was, somehow, superior to that of non-western peoples. Usually for their own good, imposed if necessary under a mandate of God and nation, non-westerners in Hawaii were expected to undergo cultural conversion. Some were eager and successful in doing so.

While modern education seeks a balance between achievement that society expects from the products of its schools and the adaptation of the system to the learning capabilities, interests and talents of the students (and parents) in Hawaii, cultural arrogance and economic values tipped the system in the direction of the goals of the white elite. Perhaps the Hawaiian alii class was schooled in part to its own interests but in any event, Hawaiians were looked upon and educated as a class apart from the white elite.

The conversion of Hawaiians to the Christian faith and their ready acquisition of literacy in their own language is one of a series of remarkable cultural transformations making up the islands' cultural history. As the shadow of American influences lengthened and became larger and clearer by mid-nineteenth century, Hawaiians followed their alii class into the future by rejecting their own language as the medium of instruction. Henceforth, any variation from the elites norm in thinking and speaking was viewed simply as a poor facsimile. The power of the elite class could now be exercised by its own standards virtually in all respects. Any deviation from that standard could be and was readily used to "explain" Hawaiian and other ethnic groups' low standing in the economic and educational world. The "deviant" was expected to look at himself for the causes of his failure. Schools developed from this mind-set were judged by the commission cited above "in the highest degree advantageous to the United States."[4] Let us now turn to "Americanization" and Hawaii's twentieth century two-class educational system.

There was little trace of sensitivity left by the turn of the century to the cultural tragedy that had befallen Hawaiians. Overall, it does not appear that the Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, Korean, Puerto Rican or even Filipino immigrants underwent the cultural pulverization suffered by Hawaiians as a class. Neither did these immigrants suffer the consequent ambivalence--ridden cultural dependency as a class. The responses of "Mongolians" and "Latins" to American-style schooling, though varied, was drawn from a sense of ethnic strength and pride.

The new American frontier was more than a safety valve for the opportune use of manpower from abroad and the pressure of stifled opportunities. "Go west young man" had been an American symbol from the beginning. But the frontier served, too, as a"gate of passage" through which to escape the discomforts of self-reflection; it was a shield against conscience while actions could be legitimized. Early American Protestant missionaries knew there was "no God West of the Horn." Frontier imagery was essentially expansionistic where often the "solution" to social and moral problems lay in the creation of greater wealth and power.

But the American tradition is a mixed one; in Hawaii, another part of that tradition stood against the unbridled drive for profits, the excesses of the contract labor system and government by special interests and racism. This gentler

side of the American heritage found its major outlet through education and other humanitarian efforts. Reformism in education drew heavily from the Enlightenment faith in rationality rather than force, and the historic ideals of equality, justice and freedom. Classist education and its expansion and reform during the twentieth century evolved out of the conflicts and controversies and contradictions of these two American traditions.

The expansionist sugar industry claimed its variety of progressive reformers who drew out of the possibilities of "industrial discipline," efficiency and management as its own image of the future. Schooling "properly" concerned was an acceptable and increasingly necessary adjunct to industrial growth. The "Americanizers" as a reform group stressed standards of citizenship and morality, and "good" English as well as industrial technique and economic productivity, and even saw democracy as a distant possibility. These reform orientations differed markedly on whether education itself could or should become a growth industry as other frontiers closed. We now turn to the class characteristics reflected in the expansion and reform of island schooling during the 1920's and 1930's.

The advice of the Congressional commission of 1898 not to make any fundamental changes in the island's educational system was followed by educational policy makers during the first two decades of the century. This in essential detail was the picture: Hawaii's population remained essentially rural and the children of plantation workers attended "non-select"* government schools to complete what today would be called elementary schooling. In Honolulu and in other smaller urban centers a wide variety of small private schools and parochial schools at the elementary level operated side by side with the public schools. These small private schools were "select" schools in the later usage of that term. With the exception of McKinley High School, all secondary education was under private auspices. The Kamehameha Schools were for select Hawaiian and part-Hawaiian youth. Mid-Pacific Institute catered to a heavily Oriental clientele as did St. Andrews Priory and Iolani. St. Louis College was the capstone of Catholic education and like the other private secondary schools was a joint religious-educational effort. As it had been since its founding in 1841, Punahou remained "the key-stone in the arch" of white Anglo-Saxon Protestant enterprise and like the apple, was believed to be what would make the Hawaiian pie American.

With technological, commercial and urban growth, the value of secondary education for the emerging but very small middle class was evident, yet at the end of the second decade only two to three percent of all high school-age island youth were enrolled in school.

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* Under the monarchy beginning in the 1850's, there developed a policy whereby Hawaiians and non-Hawaiians wishing their children to be taught in English were allowed on a matching funds basis to develop "select" schools. As English gradually replaced Hawaiian as the medium of instruction in the government school system except on the island of Niihau, the designation "select" went out of use. Although the level of English usage between schools varied widely and the matching funds provision was disallowed, government schools in which English was the mother tongue of the children continued to be regarded as "select."

The year 1920 was a major turning point in island schooling and the impulse for change was focused by the publication of the U.S. Bureau of Education Survey of Education in Hawaii. The use of the survey had become part of school reform efforts on the American mainland and the reform-minded College Club of Hawaii instigated one to be made of island schools. The major forces prompting reform were these:

1. The fear of the "Japanese Menace." This fear had been heightened as a consequence of World War I and strike action by workers on the plantations. Children born on Hawaii's soil were U.S. citizens by birth. This meant that in the future there would be a large bloc of "Japanese" voters.

2. There was an urgency to Americanize immigrant children and need of a rationale for giving first priority to government teaching jobs to those judged American in outlook, speech, manner and loyalty and to bar from teaching in any school those who were not American citizens.

These were the major recommendations of the U.S. Bureau Survey team:

1. the islands' industrialists were advised to accommodate their operations to the use of domestic labor rather than depend upon the continued importation of "coolie" labor.

2. free and compulsory intermediate and secondary schooling be made universal as resources permit.

3. the foreign language schools, essentially oriental, be brought under the direct control and supervision of the Department of Public Instruction.

4. the public schools be modified, as secondary schooling is expanded, from essentially formal academic institutions to institutions given to the socialization of the "whole child."

5. that the public school system, as it is expanded at the secondary level, retain its earlier designation of "select" schools segregated on the basis of spoken English.*

To accommodate to a domestic labor supply meant that island industrialists in time would have to face a stablized and organized labor force. Progress in that direction, it was argued by the reformers, would cut the main root of the colonial-like economic system and allow for the development of a first-class American community. Linking a new conception of manpower with education The Survey noted hopefully:

> When, in the islands, education shall have fully functioned in the lives of both those who serve by employing and directing others and

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* These schools as developed during the 1920's were known as English Standard Schools. This designation was judged to be less objectionable.

> those who serve through toiling with their hands, then all will be working as free men. Then all will be doing that which they can do best, and doing best at that which they undertake. Then, too, there will disappear from the minds of the men of Hawaii the thought that the great enterprises of the islands are dependent for success upon successive waves of cheap, ignorant, illiterate, alien laborers who stick at their jobs only through fear of want and through inability to do anything else. In short, when education shall have accomplished its true purpose there will be conferred upon man, whatever his occupation, an enlarged individuality, a wider range of thought and action, a higher and more permanent peace. And when this consummation shall have been achieved no longer can the public schools of Hawaii be justly charged with educating the young of the islands away from those occupations which require toil with the hands and making them relatively inefficient, "white-collared folk."[3]

Free, compulsory and universal secondary education was much more emphatically defended as an Americanization instrument than as a manpower training instrument. The expansion of secondary schooling would give rise to that youth peer class so necessary and effective at prying youth of alien parentage away from the value orientation of their parents and in learning English.

The foreign language schools, especially those of the Japanese, were viewed as direct and deliberate anti-Americanization institutes. The industrial leaders earlier saw little harm to their own designs coming from these schools, but the Americanizers saw the young orientals' deviation from American norms as a product of these schools. As a base for consolidating the Japanese community in its struggle for economic and social gains, these schools became the focal point of class conflict between the white elite and the Japanese.

In re-orienting the public schools to become agencies of socialization, American morality and industrial skills and techniques became curricular content along side the academic responsibility for intellect development. In the main, public secondary education was to leave the province of college preparation to the private secondary schools. This required no re-orientation in private education.

If the government's role in schooling was to be expanded as recommended, the support of tax payers had to be won. The small but growing Honolulu-based middle class supported private schools through tuition payments. The English standard schools attracted this important new class into support of public education by insuring that the language and school progress of its children would be safeguarded through segregation.

The white elite had a long standing practice of educating its own children out of direct contact with lower class children, in large measure because it had never subscribed to the democratic tenet that leadership is derived from the consent of the led. The English Standard Schools, although "select" public schools, were not considered a threat by the elite to its own standing. Advocating "high standards" in the public sector served to mask the intent of both the middle and upper class to keep the lower class in its place. The Japanese community recognized the ruse but was powerless to do much of anything about it.

At the time of the U.S. Bureau of Education survey, a good proportion of the teachers for the government schools and many for the private elementary schools were trained at the territorial Normal School. Island girls upon completion of elementary schooling rather than continuing through high school went directly to the Normal School. There they spent four years in training before being certified as elementary school teachers.

The impact of The Survey quickened the process of converting teacher preparation from a pre-collegiate to a collegiate program by supporting the idea of combining the Normal School with the College of Hawaii to form the University of Hawaii. The long range effects of this conversion were not only to supply the elementary schools with more broadly prepared teachers but to change the control over teacher preparation. This new arrangement opened the doors to professionally minded English speaking middle class islanders essentially. Now the academic demands of the University meant that the prospective teacher had to have the financial and intellectual resources to complete high school and two to four years of collegiate work. By the early 1930's, a five year collegiate program had been developed. In effect, teaching became a middle class vocation guided by professional and middle class standards and desires.

Mass secondary education became a reality in Hawaii by the end of the 1930's. The form it had taken was an accommodation to industrial and Americanization interests and a highly stratified social structure. Machines gradually replaced much of the hand work on the plantations and the flow of Filipinos into the remaining unskilled jobs vacated by Orientals slowed. Grudgingly Hawaii's industrialists accustomed themselves to a domestic labor force and to the costs of mass education, but with important conditions attached.

Vocational and manual training programs became central features of the reformed curriculum. School leaders cooperated in making schools efficient-business-like. This meant that through curricular tracking and vocational counseling, youngsters were directed toward "practical" and "realistic" life pursuits. The industrial community directed a steady stream of propaganda against 'genteel culture' and the 'overemphasis on academics' and 'white-collar learning.' A special target was the "pedagogical theorists" who did not understand or appreciate the hard realities of the industrial world.

The groundwork was thus laid for mass schooling to serve in major part as an agency for industrial recruitment, selection and certification. In effect, public schools in particular became the funnel through which talents and skills were processed and graded for vocational slots in the stratified society. Altogether, mass schooling at the eve of World War II had expanded into the central agency for controlling the flow and range of aspiration of Hawaii's youth. Industrially oriented reformers had created a system, too, for relieveing lower class discontent without disturbing the social order.

There appears to be a reversal of the priorities by which mass schooling in Hawaii and on the mainland was at first controlled. Mass education on the mainland had its essential origin in the need to insure the Revolution and the continuance of democratic institutions. Then later industrial needs became prime followed by the Progressive Era in education in which democratic and industrial priorities clashed and out of which schooling was transformed. In Hawaii, industrial needs overshadowed political needs in the schools simply because the dominant institutions were run by aristocrats rather than by democrats.

But perhaps teachers instilled in their students a sense of tentativeness about what was right and good, and maybe they reflected the democratic virtues of tolerance and open-mindedness and the clash of opinions. World War II as experienced in Hawaii offered little evidence that these virtues were important.

World War II brought with it the immediate imposition of martial law. Together, the war and martial law had a staggering impact on Hawaii's people. The 'melting pot' image was revealed to be a military-industrial image as war forged citizenship with the intensity of the battlefield. This was particularly so for those of Japanese ancestry born and educated as Americans. For three long years martial law mocked the belief that public education had successfully assimilated Hawaii's peoples into American social and political cultural patterns. Suspects returned home from the war as heros and a kind of final vindication came when in 1946 the Supreme Court ruled that martial law as imposed by Hawaii's industrial leaders in conjunction with the military was a clear violation of the United States consititution.

Long term grievances were crystallized by the war years. These grievances were skillfully utilized by such leaders as Jack Hall and John Burns to unionize and politicize the labor force and citizenry at large. These union and political reform efforts were multi-racial in nature and heavily seasoned by egalitarian and humanitarian values. A social revolution was set in motion out of which emerged the highly centralized, urbanzied, industrial-governmental-educational corporate complex Hawaii is today.

Egalitarian and humanitarian values propelled by memories of indignities and exclusion moved policy-makers for education to a heightened belief that the "new Hawaii" sought the maximization of every individuals potential and the maximization of social mobility. Education as the liberator of people's minds and mobility as a requirement of the modern industrial state became hallmarks of the new ideology. A meritocratic ideal, in which the "best" and the 'most intelligent' would rise, without distinctions made for race, sex, creed, and social class, to the responsibilities and demands of leadership in social, economic and political spheres. A new and dynamic "ability hierarchy,' by this ideal, replaced the old pre-war near-absolute social and racial hierarchial order. Education became the key component in this heady ideal.

The foreign language schools were quickly shut down by the war; language school properties were "contributed" to the war effort and many of the teachers sent to mainland concentration camps. Post-war efforts to regain the pre-war momentum of this class of schools failed mainly because orientals themselves were either opposed or disinterested in their continued existence. As a group, second generation orientals no longer saw the need for the cultural bridging function these schools had performed earlier. Assimilation into mainstream American values and behavior was the order of the day; any evidence of 'oriental exclusiveness' was to be avoided. Those of Japanese ancestry, especially, could ill-afford steps that might be considered evidence by others that assimilation was being resisted.

More non-Caucasians than Caucasians enrolled in the English Standard schools during and immediately after the war. The system's initial reason for being now stood as a reminder of pre-war favoritism and elitism. Through the strategy of disallowing first graders to enter the system after 1948 while allowing these children already in the system to continue a "standard' education through to

graduation, the system was quietly phased out while preventing a mass defection to the private schools. The accompaniment to this strategy was the premise that all public schools would at the same time be 'brought up to American standard,' in manner of speech and in manner of academic performance. How this likeness was to be achieved was as much a matter of faith as of concrete proposals.

The Legislature in many respects, chiefly financial through taxing powers, became the board of education as the move for more popular govenment surged ahead. New programs and greatly increased financial support of public schools were accompanied by much rhetoric and considerable substance in academic achievement and comprehensiveness of school experiences. Stimulated by the Cold War and the zeal to overcome the existing social and economic inequities through education, the schools became "the imperfect panacea.' An individual who did not achieve success had only himself or herself to blame since the opportunities were now available; such was the nature of the belief.

But there was another side of the post-war reform movement and that was meeting the real and great demand by the University of Hawaii in conjunction with the professional community, the government and private corporations for highly trained personnel. Here is where the finer points in the argument over the nature of democracy and/or meritocracy lay. Egalitarianism and humanitarianism when coupled with a drive for academic excellence and social mobility left many questions unanswered. In many respects social stratification and exclusiveness in the "New Hawaii' was every bit as evident as was the case in pre-war days, but the sort was different and education much more emphatically was believed to be sorter.

New avenues to 'success' and a larger piece of the growing economic pie and of the political action placed teaching as a career option in a lesser light than it had been in pre-war days. The economic and social constrictions of pre-war days made the avenue to teaching a highly selective and highly preferred one to follow. It was not until the mid-1960's that teacher education was reorganized and expanded in order to better fit the beginning teacher for the new demands being placed upon the schools. The rush to college, the ladder to social and economic success, was, perhaps, the chief demand on the schools. Time was when the marketplace afforded the means for sorting out successes, failures and grades in between. Education came to replace the marketplace in that respect.

The prestige private schools became almost exclusively college-preparatory institutions as the post-war social transformation took place. Preparing young people to go to college and to meet the academic test once admitted is, perhaps, an expression of educational philosophy. But what it expresses is that the purposes and goals of education and the institutional structure of schools are essentially matters to be settled by policy-makers in higher education. The University of Hawaii system has made it possible academically and financially for virtually anyone who wishes to go to college to do so. It is now increasingly at the college level where questions about social class and education are or should be faced.

Most of the teachers and administrators in Hawaii's schools are "products' of the post-war college boom. Only those over fifty years of age would have attended elementary and high school before World War II. Those forty or under are 'products' of post-war schooling caught up as it was in reform. It is not surprising that those born in Hawaii and who have succeeded in the "new society" generally praise the system that allowed them to succeed and generally defend the meritocratic ideal of which they themselves are offered as evidence. But schooling

since the mid-1960's has come increasingly under attack. What David Tyack says of American schools in general also applies to Hawaii:

> If earlier reforms are today the subject of attack, it is in part because substantial segments of the society no longer believe in centralism as an effective response to human need, no longer trust in professionalism, no longer accept the inevitability or justice of the distribution of power and wealth along existing class and racial lines, and no longer think that technological change implies progress.[4]

The post-war reform zeal appears to have run its course. Whether or not Hawaii has ever been without a two-class educational system is debatable but the nature of that argument now rests with policy-makers for higher education much more so than was the case in pre-war Hawaii.